



Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2008 with funding from  
Microsoft Corporation

IN MEMORIAM.  
SAMUEL W. PIERCY,

*Born August 3, 1849.*

*Died January 9, 1882.*

This collection of Letters and Extracts from the Press is printed and presented to the relatives and friends of the late Samuel W. Piercy, as a slight tribute of affection, from

HIS MOTHER

PN  
2287  
P61P6

## INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

---

The life of SAMUEL W. PIERCY was pure and beautiful, and when he was called away no one had aught but good to say of him. He was ambitious and successful, but wholly unselfish. He was a noble son, an affectionate husband, a true friend. His character was a rare combination of mental and moral excellencies, and, had death spared him for a few years longer, he would have reached the goal of his ambition—one of the foremost positions in his profession. Our late friend was born in New York, reared in California, and trained in the dramatic school of America. His success and his sorrows are told with touching earnestness in this memorial, which, in its humble way, reflects the opinion of the Press and the people.

AN APPRECIATIVE FRIEND.

COWAN LIBRARY, 1936



## LETTERS AND EXTRACTS.

---

### LAST HOURS OF THE POPULAR YOUNG ACTOR.

---

[San Francisco DAILY REPORT, January 9, 1882.]

The following dispatch was received in this city, yesterday, by Miss A. Martel, niece of the late Samuel W. Piercy:

BOSTON (Mass.), January 9th—1:35 P. M.

MISS A. MARTEL, 420 Ellis street:—Everything was done that could be. He was conscious to the last. Full particulars in mail. We have just come from his funeral. Love and sympathy.

J. A. L. WHITTIER.

Another dispatch gives the following particulars of Mr. Piercy's illness and death:

“His death occurred at 2 o'clock, A. M., yesterday. The disease of which he died was confluent smallpox. When told that death was near, Piercy said he was not afraid to die, but longed for the presence of his mother, who is in San Francisco, and wanted her telegraphed for at once. He suffered terribly during his last hours. He was conscious to the last, and gave directions as to the disposition of his effects, and left a very tender message to relatives and friends. A ring his wife had placed there he refused to have removed, though the finger swelled so that it was extremely painful. The ring he requested to be buried with him. His last words were: ‘Tell my dear mother I was not afraid to die, and that my last thoughts were of her and my darling little child.’ A committee from the Boston Lodge of the Order of Elks, in conjunction with Messrs. Byram and Tyler, of the Park Theater, representing the New York Lodge, took charge of the remains

immediately after death, and they were placed in a handsome casket, and this afternoon were interred in the Elks' Rest, Cedar Grove Cemetery. Under the State law applying to such cases, a public funeral or religious service over the body is prohibited, and it cannot be removed from its present resting-place for one year. On Sunday next, memorial services, under the direction of the Elks, will be held in the Lodge rooms. Beautiful floral tributes were sent to the grave by the management of the Park Theater, Mr. Keene, the tragedian, Mr. and Mrs. William R. Hayden, Mr. and Mrs. J. A. L. Whittier, the ushers at the Park, and the Boston Lodge of Elks."

---

#### A FEELING TRIBUTE TO THE LATE ACTOR.

---

[San Francisco DAILY REPORT Jan. 14th.]

The dark curtain has rolled down on the last act of the drama of life for Samuel W. Piercy; and behind its folds he has fallen into a dreamless sleep that kisses down his eyelids still. He is no longer an actor in those scenes of real and dramatic life in which he was wont to shine. He has done with this world—its certain miseries, its transient delights, its cruel losses, its bitterly doubtful gains. Stricken down by a deadly disease, away from home and friends, and while yet in love with life, he passed to silence and pathetic dust. It is difficult to speak impartially of the dead. Post-mortem expressions are colored, more or less, with a tender touch, and therefore cannot at all times be accepted as a just estimate of either talent or character. Yet the earthly career of Samuel Piercy was so conspicuously free from all that was base and small, that the closest scrutiny into his life reveals nothing but good.

Samuel W. Piercy was born on the 8th day of August, 1849, and during the month of December of the same year arrived in San Francisco with his parents. Having passed



through his infantile career without any precocious sign or mark of significance, he was, at a suitable age, placed in Rincon School, and later attended Dr. Huddard's Academy—then a popular institution of learning in this city. Subsequently, he continued and completed his scholastic studies at San Jose, whither his parents had moved in 1860. The curriculum of study having been concluded, and he released from his somewhat narrow sphere of action, the school-room, young Piercy, ever quick of mind and possessed of an exceptionally energetic nature, soon turned his thoughts to the sterner and more active concerns of life. Even at this early period of life Sam, as he was familiarly termed, evinced the greatest fondness for the drama; and ambition in this direction had already lifted the window and entered the chamber of the gifted boy's soul. However, dreams of this nature were not to be immediately realized, and, after the usual delays consequent upon the graduation of a young man, Sam was finally induced to enter upon the study of the law, and to that end applied for and secured a position in the office of one who was destined to turn the whole current of young Piercy's life—Gen. W. H. L. Barnes. He entered upon the discharge of his duties with that diligence, patience and industry characteristic of the man in all his undertakings—for it was a marked trait, throughout his entire life, to conscientiously perform whatever was set before him or imposed upon him. He remained in the office of General Barnes until the year 1870. On the 4th day of July of that year, and during the exercises commemorative of our national existence, an incident occurred that, so far as the law was concerned, turned his thoughts awry and finally determined him to embrace the calling of an actor. It so happened that Mr. Piercy had been selected as the reader of the Declaration of Independence for the day mentioned, while his friend and law instructor, General Barnes, was the Orator of the Day. The power, style and effect of the reading so impressed General Barnes that he at once advised Mr. Piercy to adopt the stage—a bit of friendly advice the propriety of which has never been doubted and the wisdom of which was subse-  
duently

verified. Mr. Piercy thereupon abandoned all idea of longer pursuing that jealous mistress, the law, and soon began studiously devoting himself to close study and preparation for the final adoption of his newly-chosen though long-loved art; and in November of the same year he was, through the interposition of his friend, General Barnes, permitted to make his formal *debut*, as an actor, on the stage of the California Theatre. The play was *Othello*, with Mr. Piercy as "Iago," supported by John McCullough as "Othello," and the other members of the then incomparably capable company of that theatre. Even at this, the earliest period in his professional career, the peculiar fitness of Mr. Piercy for the stage was instantly recognized by John McCullough, who gratuitously pronounced his effort "one of the finest first performances he had ever witnessed." As a coincidence, it may be mentioned that it was while playing "Iago" two short seasons since, in Cincinnati, that Mr. Piercy first attracted the serious attention of Edwin Booth. And, surely, few have entered the world of dramatic art more eminently qualified for the faithful discharge of its onerous duties than Sam Piercy. Not only did he bring to bear upon all his efforts, native genius and acquired abilities, but, in addition thereto, he seemed to have been born with a strong ambition and gifted with an intellect sufficiently vigorous to parry worldly assaults, view life as a philosopher, and so sustain himself in his efforts as to realize his ideal. His figure was graceful and his voice clear and melodious, not wholly unlike the voice of the late lamented Edwin Adams. There was noticeable, too, a dignity and elegance in his demeanor and a fascinating address, quite pronounced enough to make him entirely acceptable in whatever part he assumed. Above all, however, in the garden of his life there bloomed, blossomed and still lived on the brightest and most beautiful flower of youth—Enthusiasm. Having made his *debut*, the real struggle for public recognition and popular success now began, and with it all those accompaniments so well known and too often met with by aspirants for histrionic fame. Not desiring, or unable, to secure a metropolitan engagement, Mr. Piercy

rather than remain idle, proceeded to make a professional tour through California, Oregon and British Columbia. It was at this time and during this trip that Mr. Piercy partly learned the rudiments of his calling, and first began to realize that genuine success is the child of Patience and Experiment, and that to creditably attain the summit of his ambition there was no royal highway. The country tour over, Mr. Piercy returned to San Francisco, where he played, with more or less success, at Shields' Opera House (now Emerson's) and at the Bush Street Theatre (then the Alhambra). In October, 1874, he bade a temporary farewell to the scenes of his earliest theatric exploits, and proceeded East, making his first appearance in Chicago, at the Academy of Music, where he remained one season as leading man and playing principal support to the principal performers of the day. During the next season he traveled with McKee Rankin throughout the West, playing "Pierre" and the "Chevalier" in the romantic melo-drama, *The Two Orphans*. The following season Mr. Piercy was retained as leading man at the Arch Street Theatre, Philadelphia, and later played an engagement in the same capacity at the Museum of the same city. It was while playing in the last named city that Mr. Piercy attracted the favorable attention of Bartley Campbell, the dramatist. Mr. Campbell desired to produce his then recently written American play, *Van, the Virginian*, in England, and was looking about for a suitable representative for the leading and title role. Strolling into the theatre one evening he saw Mr. Piercy act, and was so struck with the young man's efforts that he at once opened negotiations with him with the view of securing his services for the proposed English production of his piece. The preliminaries having been satisfactorily settled and the contract signed, Mr. Piercy sailed for England with Mr. Campbell, and shortly thereafter made his appearance on the London stage in the play above mentioned. Although the play failed to achieve the great success anticipated, yet Mr. Piercy's artistic worth and excellence were most cordially recognized. His position in the dramatic world was now both secure and high. Notwithstanding his

almost sudden elevation, he still maintained a modest and dignified demeanor, rarely speaking of himself or his efforts unless direct reference thereto left him no alternative. Of a decidedly studious and somewhat severe temperament, Mr. Piercy had few *intimate* friends, although a host of acquaintances; for he believed that true happiness and certain content were to be found in the worth and choice of friends rather than in quantity. His London engagement having terminated, he returned to the United States, and was soon engaged as leading man in Cincinnati, where he supported, with credit to himself and immense satisfaction to public and manager alike, such stage luminaries as Edwin Booth and Mary Anderson. Niblo's Theater, New York, was the scene of his next professional venture, playing "Lagadere" in *The Duke's Motto* for more than sixty consecutive nights. During this engagement he also played "Badger" in Boucicault's *Streets of New York*, with marked success. Mr. Piercy then returned to San Francisco under engagement to Thomas Maguire, and was to have opened in *Diplomacy*. Legal complications having arisen with reference to the play, he substituted therefor *Craig-a-Dhoul*, a romantic Irish drama. Later he played a short engagement at the Grand Opera House. On the 29th day of August, 1879, Mr. Piercy and Miss Julia, eldest daughter of William T. Dunphy, Esq., were married. This union, together with his then bright and promising professional future, seemed to fill his cup of happiness well-nigh to overflowing, and he looked forward, as well he might, to years of domestic joy and artistic usefulness. But, just in this, the happiest, sunniest hour of all the voyage, the dark and lowering clouds were beginning to gather, and soon the vessel was to be dashed against the unseen rock and the angry billows were to roar around the sunken ship. Mr. Piercy, having concluded his professional labors here, started for the East shortly succeeding his marriage, taking with him a carefully selected company of players for the purpose of producing a play recently purchased by him, entitled *The Legion of Honor*, and which had been a short time before placed on the stage of the Baldwin Theater. Arriving in the East, Mr. Piercy entered upon a

series of engagements in the play mentioned; and while so engaged, his wife was stricken with a most malignant fever, in Philadelphia. Mr. Piercy immediately released himself from all professional work, and hastened to and remained by the bedside of his sick wife. The sufferer was subjected to the most careful treatment and received the best medical attention, but in vain. Against the stubborn sickness, love and science fell palsied and helpless. Day after day, the invalid's condition became more alarming, the exceptional severity of the Eastern climate—to which she was wholly unaccustomed—intensifying her already dangerous condition; and soon, like some lily drooping, she bowed her head and died: This sad event occurred on the 27th day of May, 1881, and almost before she had ceased to be a bride. Mr. Piercy, in company with his only child, a lovely girl, returned to this city with the remains of his loved and lost wife, where she was buried. Mr. Piercy was inconsolable over the untimely death of his wife, and only those intimately acquainted with him know the anguish and grief suffered by this heart-broken man. His married life began with a smile and ended with a sigh. Constant brooding over the loss of his wife had materially impaired his physical energies, and, for some time after, he was wholly unable to perform any kind of work. However, time and the kind ministrations of home and friends resulted in a partial recuperation; and Mr. Piercy, in about two months, returned to the East. He was immediately engaged to support the leading actor, and one of the foremost gentlemen of the American stage—Edwin Booth—who entertained for Mr. Piercy, both as man and actor, the most exalted opinion. His recent triumphs, in New York and elsewhere, as leading man in the Booth company of players, are too fresh to require comment. At the time of his death Mr. Piercy was 33 years of age, and the youngest leading man on the American stage. Splendid in past performance and rich in promise, Samuel W. Piercy, ere he had attained on life's ladder the round that marked the highest point, and when about to reap the rich reward of ripe experience and a laudable ambition,

became tired, and loosing his hold, sought rest in death's slumber.

Realizing that the supreme moment was not far distant; that soon for him the debt of nature must be paid, his thoughts ever and anon turned to his loved and loving mother and his little motherless child; and, ere he went to sleep with the angels, to those about him said: "Tell my dear mother I was not afraid to die, and that my last thoughts were of her and my darling little child." Though the spark of life has flown, yet can we speak with a saddened pleasure of him who sleeps in purity and honor. The memory of his virtues will fill our hearts with love and peace, and we will train white roses to bloom upon his grave. Your death, dutiful son, devoted friend, affectionate husband and father, will serve as a reminder of your virtue; and thus, like Pelides' charmed spear, 'twill cure the wound it makes.

"God accept him; Christ receive him."

B. T.

---

#### OBITUARY.

---

[San Francisco DAILY CALL, Jan. 10th.]

Mr. Samuel W. Piercy, whose death in Boston is noted, was born August 8, 1849, and arrived in San Francisco December 26th of the same year. He was essentially a Californian, having arrived here when but three months old, and after passing through the Rincon Grammar School and graduating from Dr. R. Townsend Huddard's Academy, determined to enter the legal profession. On the 4th of July, 1870, he was the reader of the Declaration of Independence, and by the advice of Gen. W. H. L. Barnes, the Orator of the Day, he adopted the dramatic profession, to which afterwards he studiously devoted himself. In November, 1870, he made his *debut* at the California Theatre as "Iago," and John McCullough pronounced it one of the finest first performances he had ever witnessed. He then made the tour of

California, Oregon and British Columbia. Returning to San Francisco, he played at Shield's Opera House and afterward at the Bush Street Theatre. In October, 1874, he went East, and successively appeared in Chicago, Philadelphia, New York, Cincinnati and various minor places, returning to San Francisco in 1878, where he played short engagements at the Baldwin and Grand Opera House, finishing the season in Oregon with great eclat. Returning to San Francisco, he appeared in the *Passion Play*, and thereafter, on August 29, 1879, he married Miss Julia Dunphy, daughter of William Dunphy, by whom he leaves one child. His wife's death is yet fresh in the public mind. Mr. Piercy's recent triumphs, playing second to Edwin Booth, who had become his sponsor, are too well known to require comment. The fact that the leading actor and gentleman of the American stage entertained so exalted an opinion of Mr. Piercy, speaks volumes in his favor. With the poet we may say:

His life was gentle; and the elements  
So mixed him, that Nature might stand up  
And say to all the world, "This was a man."

Ring down the curtain! The spark of life has flown from one of the noblest, kindest and most gentle creatures that ever lived! Good son, affectionate husband and father, faithful friend, we can only say farewell! May Heaven's blessing await you!

---

#### DEATH OF SAMUEL W. PIERCY.

[San Francisco DAILY ALTA CALIFORNIA, Jan. 10th.]

NEW YORK, Jan. 8.—Samuel W. Piercy, the well known actor, died in Boston at 2 o'clock this morning, after an illness of about two weeks.

Mr. Piercy was born in the city of New York, August 8th, 1849, and arrived in this city December 26th in the same year with his parents, who still reside here. He always considered himself a Californian, and his earlier recollections were of this city. He first attended the old Rincon Hill Public

School, and when his parents removed to San Jose he and his brother were left as pupils of Dr. Huddard's College. Here he remained three or four years, when he rejoined his parents at San Jose and finished his school days in the San Jose Institute. In 1866 his parents returned to this city and young Piercy decided to study for the Bar. Later he was advised to adopt the stage as his profession, which advice was acted upon, and he at once became a close student of Thespian lore. In November, 1870, he made his *debut* at the California Theatre in the character of "Iago," and so earnest and thorough had been his application that his success was assured. From this initial introduction on the theatrical boards Piercy's rise was rapid. After a tour of the Pacific Coast States, he returned to this city and appeared in many of the city theatres with steadily increasing success. He started East in 1874, appearing first at the Academy of Music in Chicago. The following four seasons were occupied with earnest work as leading stock actor in many of the principal Eastern theatres, in addition to which he made a trip to Europe with Bartley Campbell. He returned to this Coast in the beginning of 1879, and married Miss Dunphy, a highly accomplished lady of this city, but his domestic happiness was destined to be brief, as, while in Philadelphia not two years afterward, Mrs. Piercy died from typhoid fever, leaving a child scarcely a year old. The blow was a severe one to Mr. Piercy and from which he never fully rallied, though he resumed his profession at the opening of the present season by accepting an engagement with Edwin Booth as his leading support, in which he gained added laurels to his fame. Mr. Piercy was the youngest leading man in his profession, and but for his untimely death would undoubtedly have made a shining mark among the great leaders of the dramatic art. Personally, he was a man of fine appearance, of winning manners, and a universal favorite with all who knew him, and his death will be deeply deplored, not only by his friends on the Pacific Coast, but also in every place where he performed and among hosts of personal friends. He leaves a mother, father and several brothers to mourn his loss.



## A TRIBUTE FROM THE EDWIN BOOTH COMPANY.

[Eastern Paper.]

At a meeting of the members of Edwin Booth's Dramatic Company, held at the Penn-avenue Theatre, Pittsburg, Penn., the following resolutions, expressive of the deep loss the profession has sustained in the death of Samuel W. Piercy, were adopted, and a copy was forwarded to his mother in San Francisco.

*Resolved,* That in the death of Samuel W. Piercy we have lost a cherished companion, a sincere friend, a true man and a beloved brother. That the profession has lost one of its most promising votaries, an earnest student and a brilliant ornament. That in all the relations of life we ever found in him qualities that endeared him to every heart as an associate almost without fault. That as words cannot express our sorrow we unite in the heart-felt prayer that his mother and his child, whose grief we share, may be spared in this, the hour of their affliction, by the all-wise Providence that took him so suddenly from our midst. That a copy of these resolutions be forwarded to his mother in San Francisco, in token of our sympathy:

BELLA PATEMAN,  
LOUIS ELDRIDGE,  
EVA GARRICK,  
ADELAIDE H. CALVERT,  
ADELAIDE C. CALVERT,  
EDWIN CLEARY,  
L. H. EVERITT,  
EDWIN BOOTH,  
F. G. HEUBNER,  
W. A. WHITECAR,  
MASON MITCHELL,  
FRED. G. ROSS,

JOHN DAILEY,  
HENRY BRISTOL,  
NEWTON CHISWELL,  
D. C. ANDERSON,  
N. PATEMAN,  
BARTON HILL,  
M. HENRY FLOHE,  
WILLET CARPENTER,  
GEO. ALLEN,  
N. E. MILLER,  
MAZE EDWARDS.

## HIS MESSAGE OF SYMPATHY.

[San Francisco News Letter, Jan. 14th.]

The introduction to Pleasure's Wand this week must necessarily be a sad one, because, before going the round of our local amusements and criticizing the performances at the different theatres, there stands out in bold relief the great event of the week—the death of Samuel W. Piercy. He was so essentially a Californian, and so especially a friend of the

author of this department since 1873, that not to linger in dumb thought over his memory were an impossibility, while to write of him is a pleasure full of pain. His short life was full of activity—brilliant and decisive—a mixture of triumph and disappointment, of the acme of joy and the zero of woe. His bride, Miss Julia Dunphy, was taken from his arm by typhoid fever, at a time when he had every reason to hope for many long years of her companionship and love, and he was left alone with his baby, and with no other hope of beating down the trouble of his life except by constant and unremitting hard work. He was so devoted to the wife whom he lost for a little while, and whom he has now rejoined, that he brought her from the East here before their baby was born, so during that anxious time she might have her mother and sisters near her, and he sacrificed professional engagements, within his reach East, so that he might fulfill what he conceived to be his duty to his wife. He was by nature most persevering and energetic, strict towards himself and very tender to others. At the time of his death he had not reached the fruition of the tree of his ambition, and he had still much to learn in his profession. Had he lived to the 8th of August next he would have been thirty-three years of age, for his birth dates from the month of the year 1849 of which our oldest pioneers are most proud. His history and life have been given to the world by the wires, and there is no need to go over them here. Perhaps the last words he uttered on earth are the key to his whole soul: "Tell my dear mother I was not afraid to die and that my last thoughts were of her and my darling little child." O, reader, can you picture anything more utterly unselfish? Can you imagine a purer soul than this, racked with pain and dying of that dread disease, small-pox, yet forgetful of itself and in its last moments trying to assuage the grief of those nearest and dearest to it by a message of sympathy? Samuel W. Piercy has played his last drama here on earth and those of us who knew him and loved him may all say sincerely: *Suscipiat te Christus qui vocavit te et in sinum Abrahae angeli deducant te.*

A LETTER FROM EDWIN BOOTH.

---

PITTSBURG, Jan. 12, 1882.

MRS. PIERCY:—*Dear Madam:*—I beg to offer you some token of my sympathy in your affliction. I should have done so when the news of your dear son's death first reached me, but I have not been master of my time these many weeks and even now I am obliged to be very brief. My acquaintance with your son was very slight, but it was very agreeable, and I felt much interest in him professionally. His death was a severe shock to us all, who confidently expected him to resume his place in the company before many weeks had passed. You have the full sympathy of all his comrades, who report nothing but good of him. Not knowing your circumstances I venture to send in lieu of words the accompanying amount (\$1,000) which I hope will be of service to the dear mother and daughter of my lamented comrade. With kindest regards I am

Respectfully Yours,

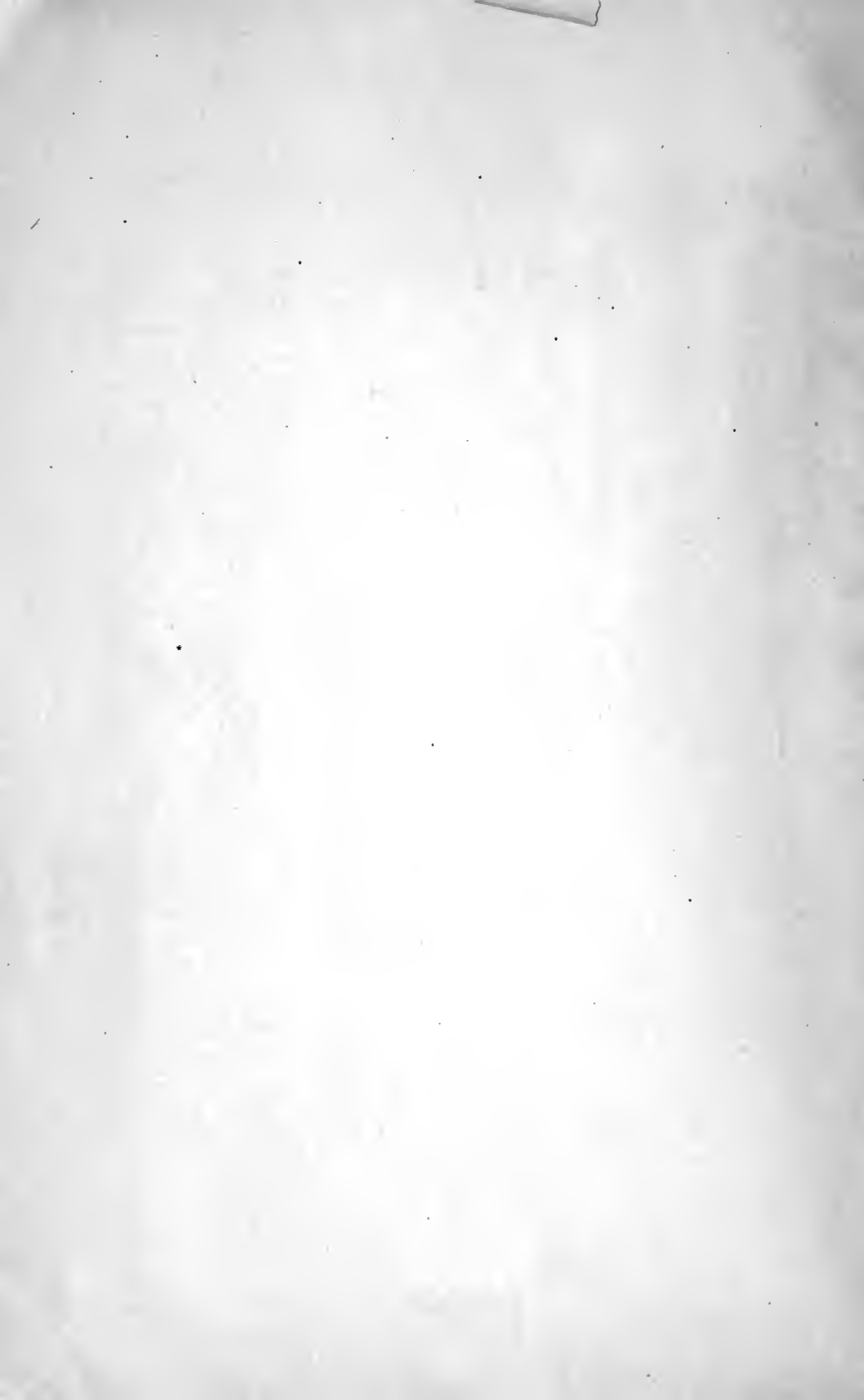
EDWIN BOOTH.

Abbey's Park Theatre, New York.

---

TO THE BENEVOLENT ORDER OF ELKS, TO MR. AND MRS. J. A. L. WHITTIER, TO MR. EDWIN BOOTH, and the many, many others who were kind and appreciative friends of my son, I tender a mother's gratitude.

MARY A. PIERCY.



UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



AA 000 493 146 5

PN  
2287  
P61P6

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
AT  
LOS ANGELES  
LIBRARY